



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

JOURNAL

OF

BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Volume XXXI

Part II

1912

Some Notes on the Use of אל in Genesis

ROYDEN KEITH YERKES

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

THERE are eighteen occurrences of the word אל in Genesis, omitting 35 7 (with LXX, Luc., and Vulg.), and reading אר for את in 49 25 (with LXX, Luc., 3 Mss., Sam., and Syr.). It occurs five times with the article, either simply (31 13 and 46 3, both E), or with a preposition (35 1 E and 49 25 J). Of the thirteen remaining instances, one is the אל אלהי ישראל 33 20 (E), with which may be compared the יהוה אלהי ישראל Jos. 8 30. The others are all in the epithetical combinations, אל עליין (14 18. 19. 20. 22), אל ראי (16 13 J), אל שדי (17 1 28 3 35 11 48 3, all P, 43 14 E, and 49 25 J), and אל עולם (21 33 J). All but four of these instances are from Preprophetic writings, and generally admitted to be based upon very old, possibly Premosaic, traditions, and the four uses of אל שדי in P are confirmed by both J and E, and therefore probably from a similarly old tradition. For the sake of simplicity I shall not translate the term at present, but shall content myself with the simple transcription of the Hebrew letters, El.

We have here to do with a common Semitic word, which appears also in Phœnician, in Aramaic, in Assyrian, and in Arabic. To the present writer it appears certain that it had a wide use in the early Hebrew traditions, and that the

recorders of those traditions, J, E, and P, intentionally, and for theological reasons, substituted the יהוה or אלהים for an original reading אל. It is the oldest Semitic term for "deity," "divinity," and, as such, was applied to the numina which were believed to frequent the ancient sacred stones, trees, and springs. But, even in Premosaic times, it connoted far more than the idea of the local numen, and the writers of the prophetic schools J and E saw in it merely a synonym of יהוה or אלהים, which they constantly used.

In 35 1 (E) Jacob is commanded to go to Bethel and build an altar לאל הנראה אליך, "to the El who appeared to thee," and in v. 3 he proposes to obey the command, and to build an altar לאל הענה אתי, "to the El who answers me," while in 31 13 (E) he is described as recording the words of a vision אנכי האל בית אל, "I am the El, Beth-el," or "I am the El at Bethel." The LXX translators, as well as the Targums (Onkelos and Jonathan), realizing the impossibility of the article with a word in the construct, and knowing nothing of the possibility of Beth-el as a possible proper name of a divinity, read אנכי האל הנראה אליך בית אל. The reference is plainly to the Bethel vision recorded by both J and E, whose records are combined in 28 11-22. There is a general unanimity of opinion in the assignment of these verses to their respective sources, and, for our purpose, the accepted division serves all needs. To J belong vv. 10. 13-16, 19 and 21 b; vv. 11-12. 17-18. 21 a and 22 belong to E.

The two accounts agree in the following points:

1) That Jacob accidentally chose the spot as a place in which to spend the night.

2) That, while he was sleeping, some sort of theophany occurred there as an entire surprise to him.

3) That, accordingly, he termed the place a "Beth-el."

In J all reference to the stone or to the ladder is omitted, and it is Jahweh himself, and not one of his angels, who appears to the sleeping wanderer. But the passage looks as if the writer had taken an old tradition and intentionally omitted parts, and, instead of the אל which belonged to the original, used the name יהוה, excepting in the name of the

place, where it would be obviously impossible in a narrative that purported to give the etymology of the famous shrine Bethel. Accordingly Jacob is made to say that because Jahweh was in the place, and he was unconscious of the fact, he would call the place "Beth-el," which is something of a *non sequitur*. This difficulty, as well as the linguistic awkwardness of v. 16 is removed if, instead of יהוה במקום הזה, יש אל במקום הזה.

On the other hand, E has omitted none of the old tradition, mentioning even the anointing of the stone, but the intimate association of God with the stone, or with the place, as in J, was contradictory to his theological conceptions, that the dwelling place of God was in heaven, and he has therefore altered the tradition to keep it in harmony with that notion. It is not God himself, but his angels, which E records as appearing to the wanderer. However, he neglects to make this change in his reference to the story in 35 1, which preserves, not only the tradition of the theophany, but even the original word אל, instead of the later plural אלהים. It would seem that the original tradition underlying this passage was that of the appearance of an El at a sacred stone.

The same result appears from a study of the flight of Hagar (16 1-14, all J except 9-10 E). Hagar flees from Sarai, and the מלאך יהוה finds her by עין משפט. He tells her she is pregnant, and promises a future for her son, adding וקראת שמו ישמעאל כי שמע יהוה אל עניך. The story continues by saying ותקרא שם יהוה הדבר אליה אתה אל ראי. From the form of v. 11 we should expect the name ישמעיהו, but, if we substitute יהוה for אל, the verse reads readily enough. Again, it is the מלאך who addresses Hagar, but in v. 11 it appears that the divinity himself had spoken. The suggested emendation is to supply, as the original reading, האל for מלאך יהוה in vv. 7 and 11. Finally, the word ומצאה is out of place. It is the only connection of this word with יהוה. The most natural word to be expected, whether we use אל or יהוה as the subject, is ויִּרָא. Likewise, in v. 13, instead of the very late Qal participle הדובר, we should

expect **הנראה**. The emended verses, then, would read
 **וירא אליה האל** (11) **ויאמר לה האל**
וקראת שמו ישמעאל כי שמע האל אל עניך : (13) **ותקרא שם**
האל הנראה אליה אתה אל ראי

The **יהוה** of 17 1 (P) is evidently a later interpolation. Another subject stood in this place in the original document which was used by P. If that subject had been the word usually used by P, there would be little reason for the change. If, however, the subject was **האל**, we have another instance of a stereotyped form, **וירא האל**, with which narratives of theophanies were wont to begin in the ancient traditions. My suggestion is that there was such a form, and that in J this was regularly changed to **יהוה** or **מלאך יהוה**, while in E it naturally became **אלהים** (12 7 18 1 26 2. 24 35 9 46 29).

Into the etymologies of the epithets compounded from I cannot enter here. In general, they describe some activity, physical or moral, of the El. More important is the question whether they are the names of separate and individual deities, or whether they are different appellatives of the same deity, or, in other words, whether there was a common deity worshiped by the Israelite tribes, or the Semitic ancestors of those tribes, in Premosaic times.

In the so-called "blessing of Jacob" (chap. 49), there occurs in the address to the tribe of Joseph (v. 25) the expression **מאל אביך**, which is paralleled, according to the emended reading, with **אל שדי**. In the dream of 46 3 (E) the deity is represented as saying **אנכי האל אלהי אביך**. This verse may be regarded in one of two ways. It may be considered as a fuller form of **אנכי אל אביך**, thus probably paralleled with the expression "God of the fathers," which occurs in all the Preëxilic documents of the Pentateuch (Ex. 3 6 E, 4 5 J, and often in the prefatory and concluding chapters of Deuteronomy). On the other hand, **האל** may be considered as a proper name, and **אלהי אביך** as an attributive clause.